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ABSTRACT

This pamphlet summarizes the key findings of a two-part study that investigated the messages that young women (age 10 to 17) get from the media. A content analysis examined messages to girls across a range of media most heavily used by adolescent girls: television, movies, magazines, music videos, television commercials, and magazine advertisements. The accompanying national survey of young people sought to determine children's reactions to television's gender role messages. The pamphlet discusses key findings, which illustrate the dual role media play: media often offer girls strong, positive role models; yet media often reinforce female stereotypes, with appearance shown as more important for women than for men, and with the message that relationships are more important for women than occupations or careers. Key findings further show that: children believe television provides positive role models and messages about gender; children are aware of ways in which television reflects and may reinforce gender stereotypes; girls want to look like characters they see on television; more girls than boys think the kids on TV are like them and their friends; and girls turn often to many different types of media. The study provides evidence of the mixed--sometimes limiting--messages that media are sending to girls. It demonstrates that the messages sent in even one television show, movie, magazine, advertisement, or music video do not stand alone, but become part of a larger sphere of influence in girls' lives, and thus have the power to reinforce--or the potential to challenge--all other messages girls are sent. Ending notes offer information about the content analysis methodology; survey methodology; and about the sponsoring organizations. (SR)

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ED 444 216

Reflections of Girls in the Media

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A Two-Part Study on Gender and Media

Summary of Key Findings

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CS 510 410

A content analysis across six media

Overview: A Two-Part Study

As they move from childhood to adolescence, both girls and boys begin to redefine themselves. They develop their moral and ethical code, learn to handle their emerging sexuality, construct a new self-image to conform to their changing bodies, clarify their gender role conceptions, and prepare for their future occupational roles. Throughout this process, adolescents look to many sources — family, friends, religion and the media — for guidance.

From an early age, girls are active users of media, watching hours of television a week, listening to radio and CDs, watching music videos, and reading fashion magazines. Researchers have suggested that the cumulative impact of this media may make it one of the most influential forces in the adolescent community.

To understand more about the messages that young women get from the media, Children Now and the Kaiser Family Foundation commissioned a two-part study. The content analysis is the first study to examine messages to girls across a range of media — television, movies, magazines, music videos, television commercials and magazine advertisements. The accompanying poll seeks to determine children's reactions to television's gender role messages.

"The combined effect of these studies provides all those concerned about America's girls with a clear agenda: give girls an unequivocal message that they are valued for who they are, what they do, and who they want to become. Media leaders can take pride that they portray many women as intelligent problem solvers, but they should also be aware of how often they just paint a pretty picture."

Lois Salisbury
President
Children Now

The results of these studies illustrate the dual role media play. The media offer girls many positive role models — women shown being self-reliant and using intelligence, honesty and efficiency to achieve their goals. The study also shows, however, that the media often send stereotypical messages about appearance, relationships and careers, and that all of these messages are reinforced across the range of media girls enjoy. Finally, the poll confirms that children themselves are well aware of both media's inspiring, and limiting, messages.

Key Findings

Media often offer girls strong, positive role models
In the media favored by teenage girls, women are often portrayed as strong, positive characters — offering girls role models to emulate and imitate.

Women in the media are often shown as independent, depending first upon themselves to solve their own problems and to achieve their goals.

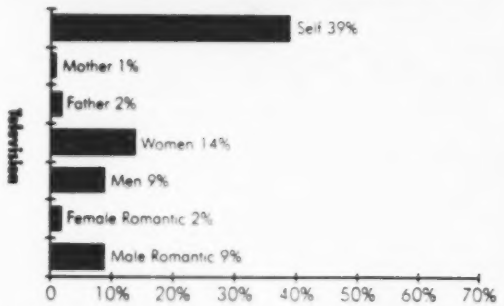
- In TV programs, 35% of women and 32% of men rely on themselves to solve their problems, and even more women (39%) and men (38%) depend on themselves to achieve their goals.
- In the movies, 35% of women and 49% of men solve their own problems, while 62% of women and 67% of men depend on themselves to achieve their goals.
- Subtly reinforcing these messages, 29% of commercials targeted at women appeal to them "being in control," compared with 2% directed at men.
- And 28% of magazine articles also emphasize self-reliance. Very few articles encourage young women to seek the help of men or their male romantic partners.

Women are shown as honest, direct and intelligent and frequently use their intelligence to achieve their goals.

- On television, 46% of women and 52% of men are frequently shown acting in an honest and direct way, while in the movies 58% of women and 47% of men are seen acting this way.
- 34% of women and 30% of men on TV are shown using their intelligence. In movies, 69% of women and 71% of men are seen as behaving with intelligence.

Key Finding

Who Do Female Characters Rely on to Achieve Their Goals?



Movies: 62% of female characters in movies depend on themselves to achieve goals.

Teen Magazines: 28% of articles encourage readers to rely on themselves to solve a problem.

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Media often reinforce female stereotypes

This research also demonstrated that the media favored by teenage girls often send them limiting messages about their priorities and potential. The media reinforce troubling stereotypes about the relative importance of appearance and relationships to women's lives, while stressing that careers are more important for men than women.

Women continue to be underrepresented in most media, which limits opportunities to portray women in a full range of roles.

- TV has the highest representation of women, with 55% men and 45% women; movies have 63% men and only 37% women; television commercials have 58% men and 42% women; and music videos have 78% men and 22% women (although this is largely due to the composition of music groups).
- Only magazines directed at teen girls have more women than men, with 70% women and 30% men in articles and 82% women and 18% men in advertisements.

Women are most often portrayed in the context of relationships. Men, on the other hand, are most often seen in the context of careers.

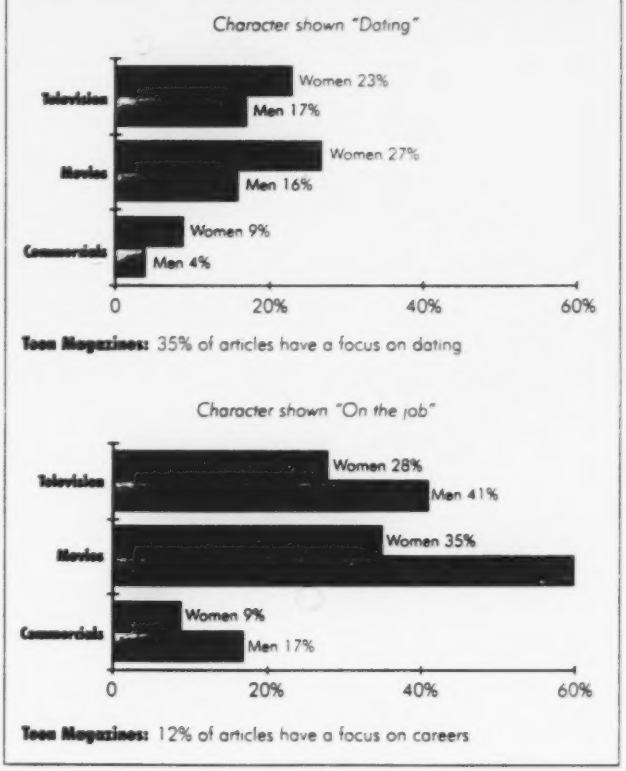
- More women than men are seen dating across a range of media — on TV 23% of women compared to 17% of men, in movies 27% of women compared to 16% of men, and in commercials 9% of women compared to 4% of men.
- In contrast, men are seen spending their time "on the job" far more often than women in all media — on TV 41% of men compared to 28% of women, in movies 60% of men and 35% of women, in commercials 17% of men and 9% of women.
- Women are also more likely to be motivated by the desire to have a romantic relationship — on TV 32% of women and in the movies 35% of women are motivated by romance, compared to 20% of men in each instance.
- In contrast, on TV 32% of men are motivated by the desire to get or succeed in a job, compared to 24% of women. In movies, 53% of men were motivated by their career, compared to 31% of women.
- Magazine articles reinforce this message by focusing much more on "dating" (35% of their articles) than they do on subjects like "school" or "careers" (12%).

Media's female portrayals send girls messages emphasizing a woman's ideal appearance and the importance of this appearance to their lives.

- 37% of the articles in teen magazines include a focus on appearance.

Key Finding

Across media, women are seen in context of romantic relationships more frequently than men and in the context of work less frequently than men.



- Across media, many women are portrayed as thin or very thin, which is especially noticeable when compared to men: in TV, 46% of women and 16% of men; in movies, 39% of women and 4% of men; in TV commercials, 32% of women and 6% of men; in teen magazine articles, 34% of women and 6% of men; in magazine advertisements, 26% of women and 8% of men; in music videos, equal percentages of women (43%) and men (44%) are thin.
- Women are much more likely than men to make or receive comments about their appearance in all three media — on TV 28% of women compared to 10% of men, in movies 58% of women to 24% of men, and in commercials 26% of women compared to 7% of men.
- Women are seen spending their time in appearance related activities such as shopping and grooming. On TV, 10% of women compared to only 3% of men can be seen "grooming" or "preening." In movies, this grows to 31% of women and 7% of men, and in TV commercials, it's 17% of women to less than 1% of men.

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A national survey of young people

A survey of 10-17 year-olds found that young people today are getting conflicting messages when it comes to how women are portrayed both personally and professionally in television shows. They see women frequently portrayed as good role models — acting with confidence, independence and intelligence. However, kids are also very aware of the messages girls receive about appearance, as well as of the ways television relies on gender stereotypes.

Key Findings

Kids believe television provides positive role models and messages about gender:

- 52% of girls and 53% of boys say there are enough good role models for girls today in television, although more girls (44%) than boys (36%) say there are too few.
- Older girls ages 16-17 are less likely (46%) than younger girls ages 10-12 (56%) to think there are enough good role models for girls.

"Television clearly makes an impression on kids today, whether it's in what they think they should look like or the qualities they associate with women and men. The media is a powerful tool that can either reinforce negative stereotypes or present strong role models for young girls and boys today."

Matt James
Senior Vice President
Kaiser Family Foundation

- Majorities of 10-17 year olds also say there are enough good role models for boys in television (56% of girls and 64% of boys).
- Girls and boys think television shows the importance of having a career or job for both women (67% and 68% respectively) and men (73% and 72% respectively).
- Kids also think television shows boys and girls as equals (57% of girls and 61% of boys agree), although over one-third of boys and girls disagree.
- Majorities of both girls and boys say qualities such as confidence, problem solving, intelligence, and wanting to be in a relationship, are equally likely to be displayed by male as well as female television characters.

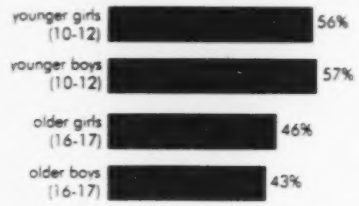
Kids are also very aware of ways in which television reflects and may reinforce some gender stereotypes:

- Both girls (61%) and boys (53%) say the female characters they see on television are thinner than women in real life, but that male characters on television are about the same weight as the men in real life (61% of girls and 58% of boys).

Key Finding

As girls, and boys, get older, they become more critical of media female portrayals

(Percent who think there are enough role models for girls on TV)



- Older girls (71% of girls ages 16-17) are more likely to think women television characters are thinner than women they know in real life than do younger girls (51% of girls ages 10-12).
- Kids notice an emphasis on attractiveness, especially for women and girls, in television shows: 57% of girls and 59% of boys say the female characters in the television shows they watch are "better looking" than the women and girls they know in real life.
- Worrying about appearance or weight, crying or whining, weakness, and flirting are all qualities both girls and boys say they associate more with a female character on television than a male character. Playing sports, being a leader, and wanting to be kissed or have sex, on the other hand, are thought of as characteristics displayed more often by male characters.

Who on TV Do You "Most Admire?"

7 of 10 TV Characters Girls "Most Admire" Are Male

1. Will Smith
2. Martin Lawrence
3. Jonathan Taylor Thomas
4. Tim Allen
5. Tom Cruise
6. Brandy
7. Jerry Seinfeld
8. Jim Carrey
9. Oprah Winfrey
10. Rosie O'Donnell

- Both girls (62%) and boys (58%) say the female characters they see on television usually rely on someone else to solve their problems, whereas male characters tend to solve their own problems (53% of girls and 50% of boys agree).

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Continued from page 3

Key Finding

Have You Ever Wanted to Look Like a TV Character?

69% of girls – and 40% of boys – say they've wanted to look like a TV character

Girls want to look like the characters they see on television:

- 7 out of 10 (69%) girls — and 40% of boys — say they have wanted to look like, dress, or fix their hair like a character on television.
- Furthermore, 31% of girls and 22% of boys say they have changed something about their appearance to be more like a television character.
- And 16% of girls and 12% of boys say they have dieted or exercised to look like a television character.

More girls than boys, in particular, think the kids on television are like them and their friends:

Who on TV Do You Most Admire?

All TV Characters Boys "Most Admire" are Male

1. Michael Jordan
2. Tim Allen
3. Bart Simpson
4. Martin Lawrence
5. Will Smith
6. Jerry Seinfeld
7. Jim Carrey
8. Homer Simpson
9. Jean Claude Van Damme
10. Arnold Schwartzenegger

- 59% of girls and 46% of boys believe the girls they see on television are like them and their friends, while 52% of girls and 49% of boys believe that the boys they see on television are like them and their friends.
- Among girls and boys who think television characters that are about their age are not like themselves, the majority say it is because they behave differently (51%).

Girls turn often to many types of media:

- Girls between 10 and 17 spend most of their time listening to CDs and tapes (50% very often), listening to the radio (46% very often), and watching television programs (32% very often).
- In a middle tier, girls are watching movies on the VCR (24% very often), reading fashion magazines (24% very often), going to the movies (15% very often), reading magazines other than fashion magazines (12% very often), and playing video or computer games (11% very often).

Key Finding

Girls Use Many Types of Media

(percent that use media "very often")

Listen to CDs and tapes	50%
Listen to radio	46%
Watch television programs	32%
Watch movies on VCR	24%
Read fashion magazines	24%
Go to movies	15%
Read non-fashion magazines	12%
Play video or computer games	11%

Conclusion

As girls leave childhood, enter adolescence, and begin to develop into the women they will become, they look to many sources, including the media, for guidance. This study demonstrates that the messages sent in even one television show, or movie, or magazine, or advertisement, or music video do not stand alone. They become part of a larger sphere of influence in girls' lives and thus have the power to reinforce, or the potential to challenge, all other messages girls are sent. And our survey shows that no one is more aware of these messages than young people themselves. Our hope is that these studies — by highlighting media's potential to offer girls role models and showing how well it is sometimes done — will encourage the creation of even more positive female portrayals throughout media.

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Content Analysis Methodology

Dr. Nancy Signorielli of the University of Delaware conducted the analysis. She examined six types of media that are among the most heavily used by teenage girls. In order to get an accurate sense of the total messages girls receive during a specific period, the media were sampled during the month of November 1996 to the extent possible. The sample of media included:

- Top 25 television shows favored by girls 12-17 for two weeks in November 1996;
- Top 15 movies released in 1995 seen by girls 12-17 in movie theaters [available for rental in November 1996];
- 4 issues each of the top four teen magazines [September - December 1996];
- Top 20 music videos ranked on MTV for the first three weeks of November 1996;
- Television commercials shown before, during and after the sample of television shows; and
- Magazine advertisements from the sample of teen magazines.

Whenever possible, the same coding guidelines were used to code each of the samples. Coders underwent rigorous training to ensure reliability.

Survey Methodology

The findings here are based on a nationwide survey of 1,200 children ages 10 to 17 designed jointly by Children Now, the Kaiser Family Foundation, and Lake Sosin Snell & Associates, and was conducted by Lake Sosin Snell & Associates. The interviews consisted of a base sample of 400 girls and 400 boys ages 10 to 17, with oversamples of African American and Hispanic boys and girls (100 of each). These oversamples were weighted into the base sample so that each of these demographic groups reflects their actual contribution to the total population of children. The sample size with these weights applied is 800 cases. The poll, which was conducted between April 1 and April 7, 1997, has a margin of error of +/- 3.5%.

Kaiser Family Foundation

The Kaiser Family Foundation, based in Menlo Park, California, is a non-profit independent national health care philanthropy and is not associated with Kaiser Permanente or Kaiser Industries. The Foundation's work is focused in four main areas: health policy, reproductive health, and HIV in the United States, as well as health and development in South Africa.

Children Now

Children Now is a non-partisan, independent voice for children, working to translate the nation's commitment to children and families into action. Children Now acts as a strong and independent voice for the millions of children who cannot speak for themselves — in the public policy arena, in the mass media and in the community.

Children & the Media Program

The Children & the Media Program works to improve the quality of news and entertainment media for children and about children's issues. We seek to accomplish that goal through independent research, public policy development and outreach to leaders in the media industry.

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Full copies of the two studies referenced in this document are available by calling the Kaiser Family Foundation's publication request line at 1-800-656-4KFF. Ask for package #1260.

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